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(54) **FINGERPRINT-ASSISTED FORCE ESTIMATION**

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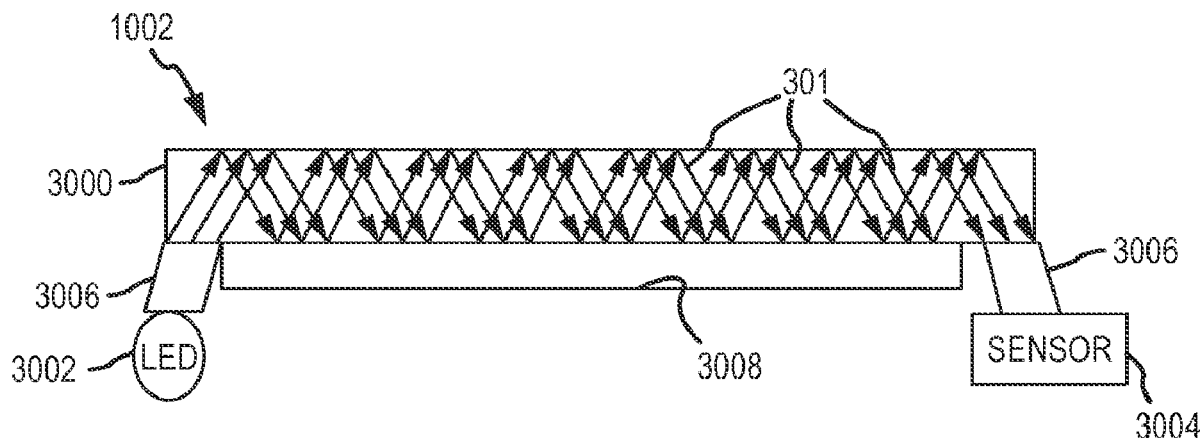
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(57) **ABSTRACT**
Embodiments may take the form of a system having a user input device and a first sensor coupled to the user input device. The first sensor is configured to sense touch on a surface of the user input device. The system may also include a second sensor in communication with the surface of the user device configured to sense wetting of a user's fingerprint on the surface. The system has a processor coupled to the first and second sensors and configured to estimate an amount of force applied by the user's fingerprint based at least in part upon the sensed wetting of the user's fingerprint.

20 Claims, 13 Drawing Sheets



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G06F 3/044	(2006.01)

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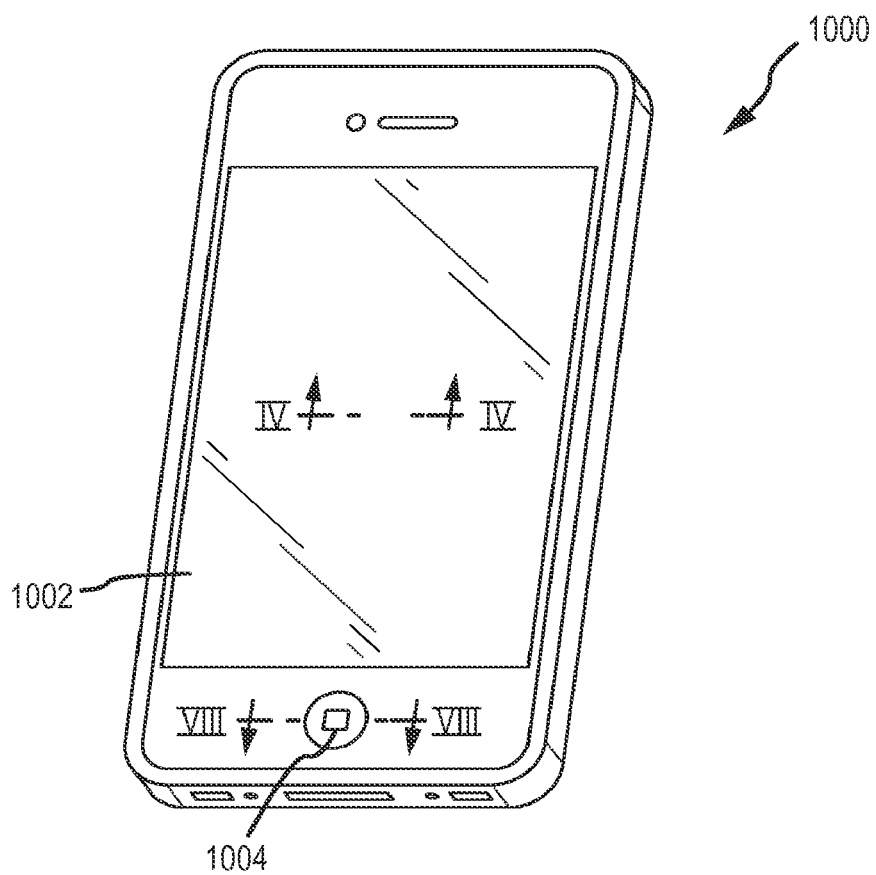


FIG. 1

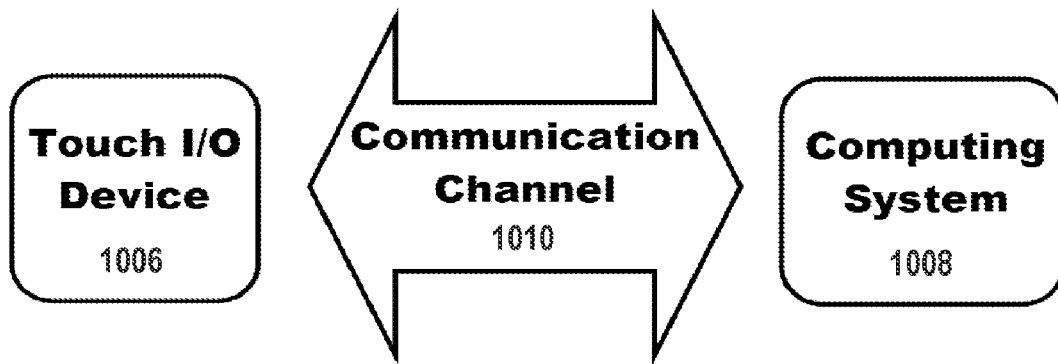


FIG.2

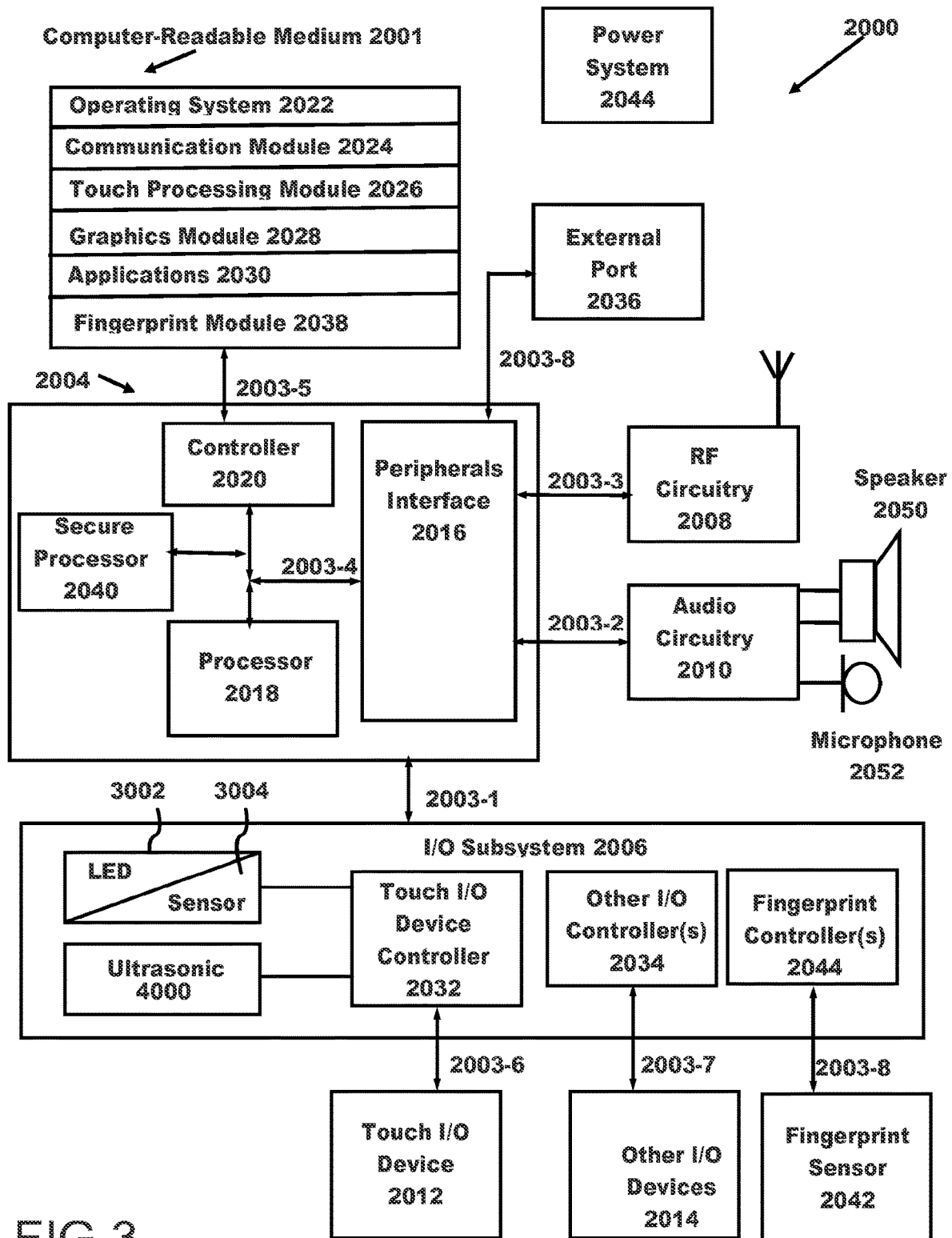


FIG.3

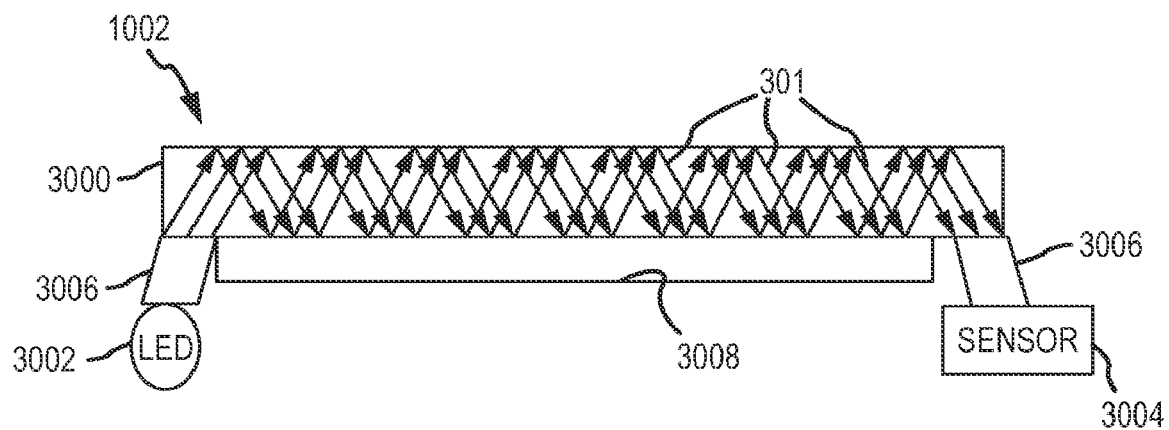


FIG.4

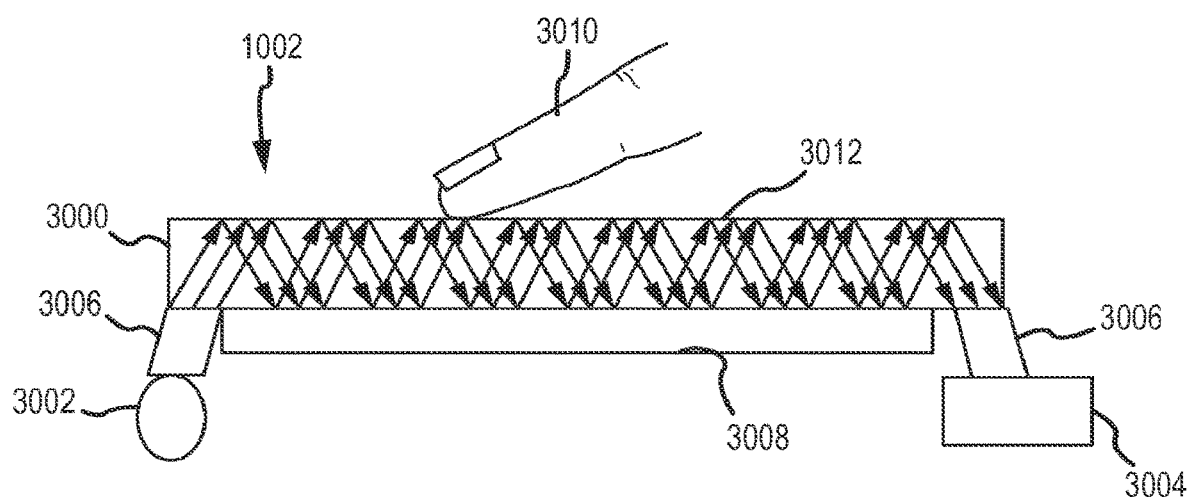


FIG.5A

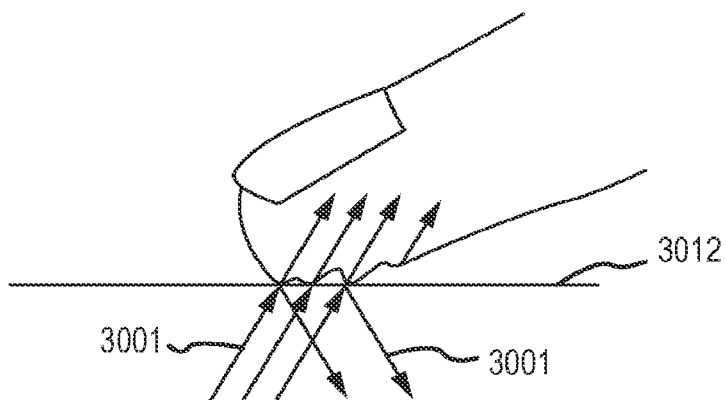


FIG. 5B

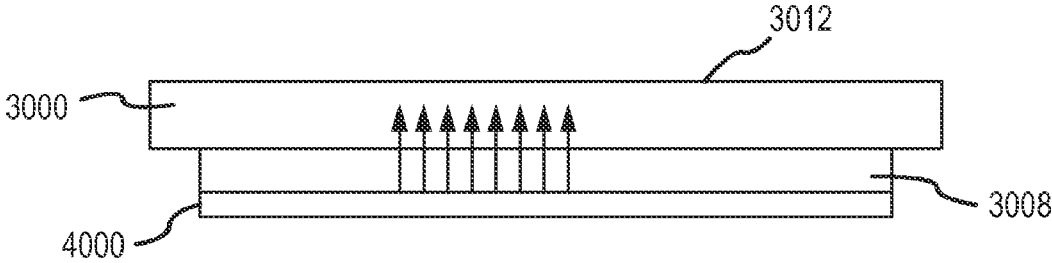


FIG.6

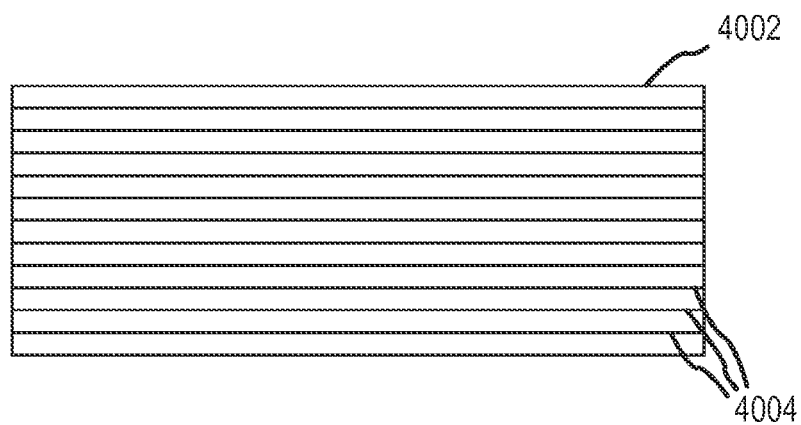


FIG. 7A

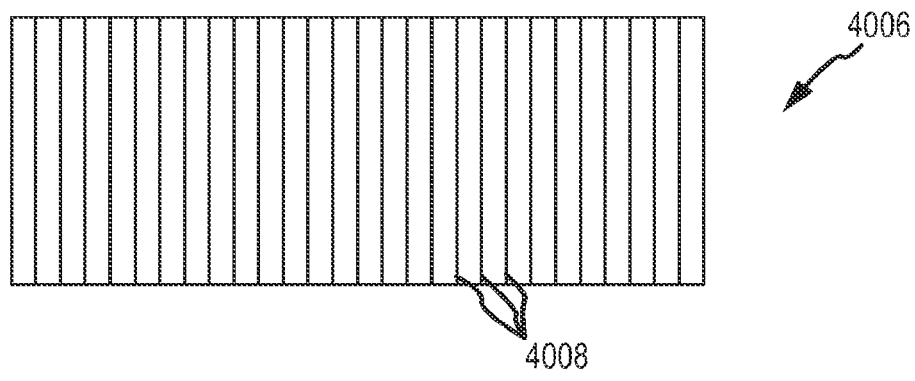


FIG. 7B

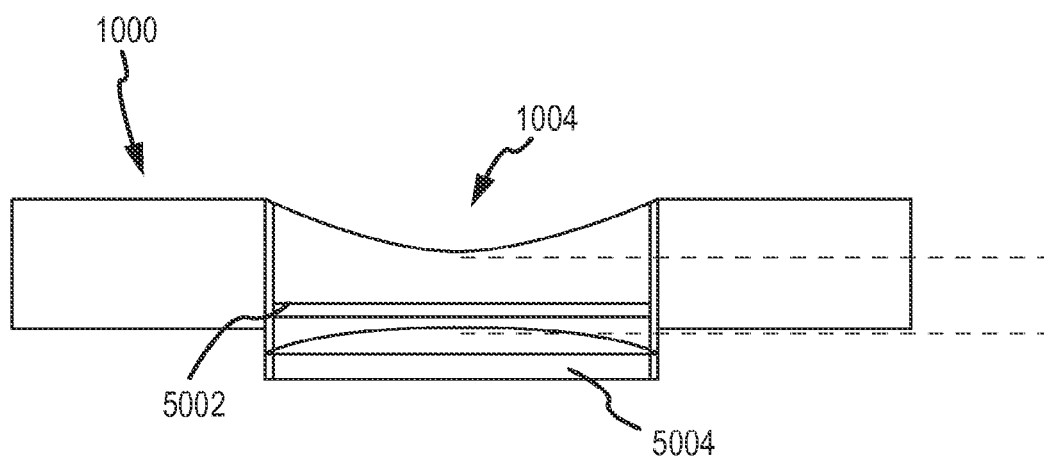


FIG. 8

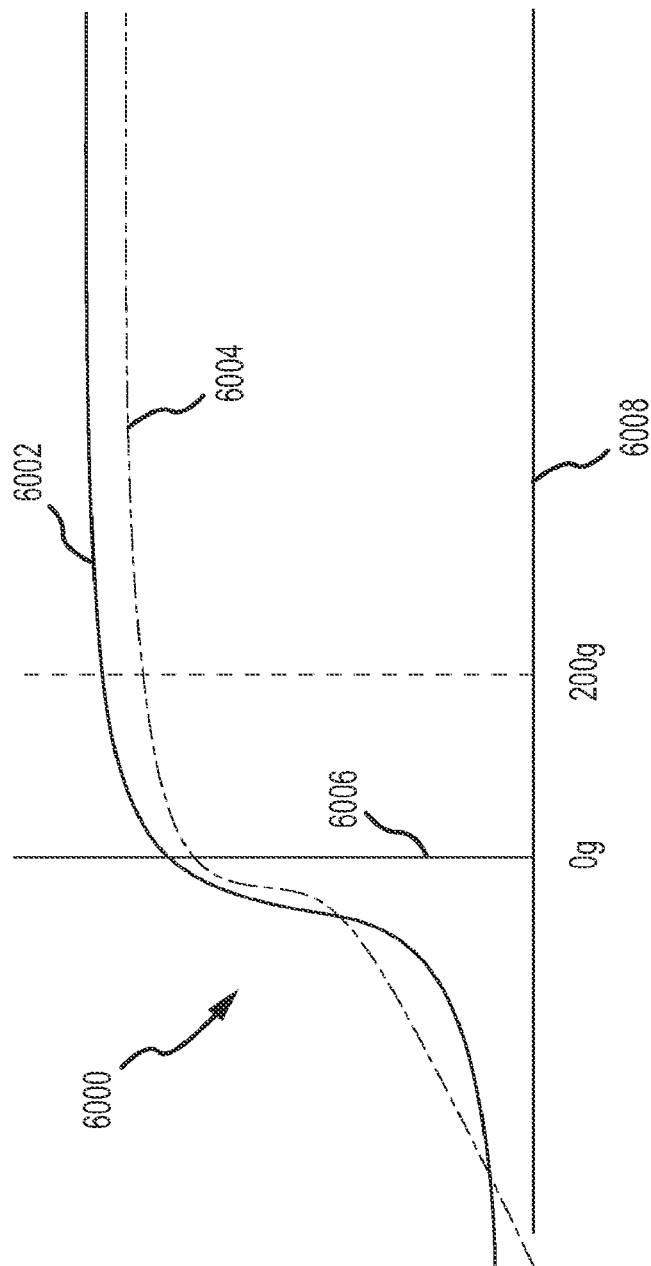


FIG.9

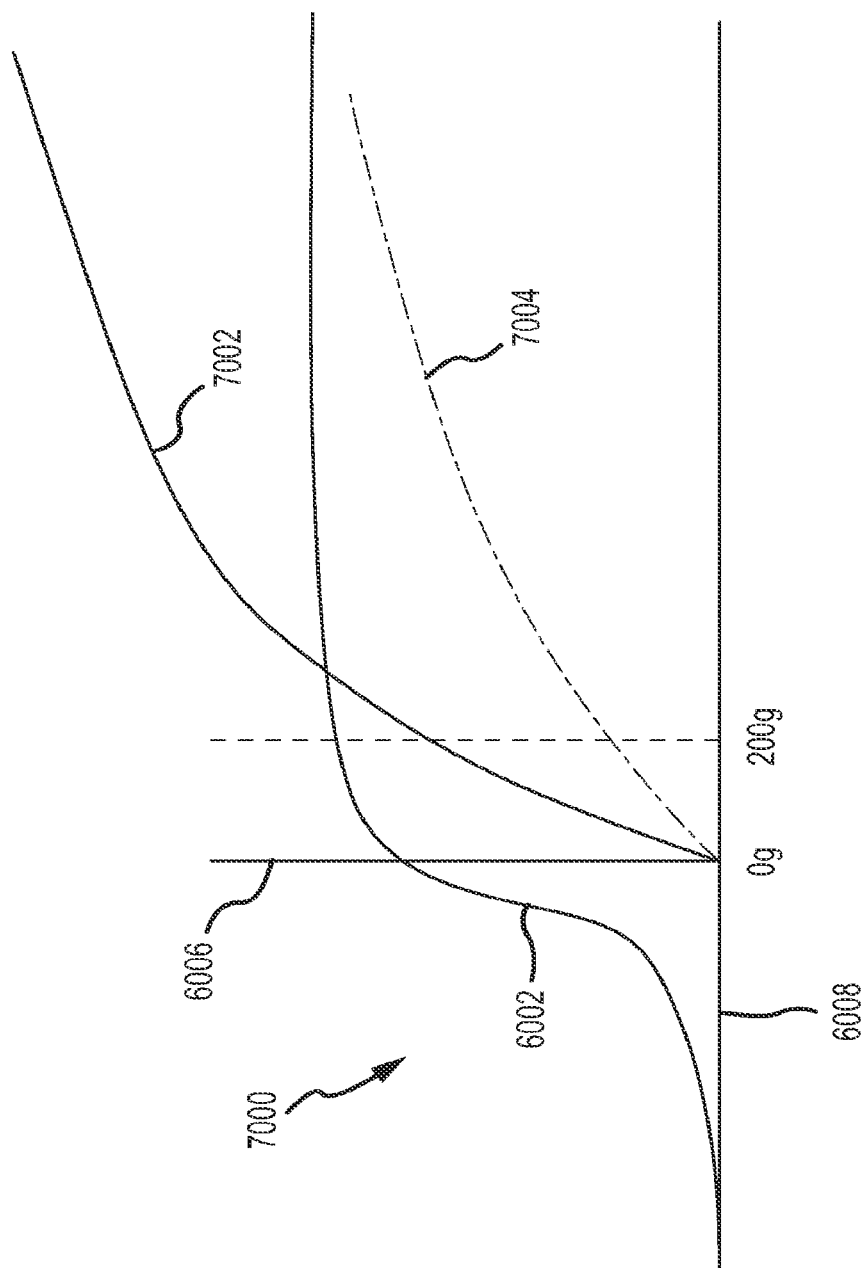


FIG.10

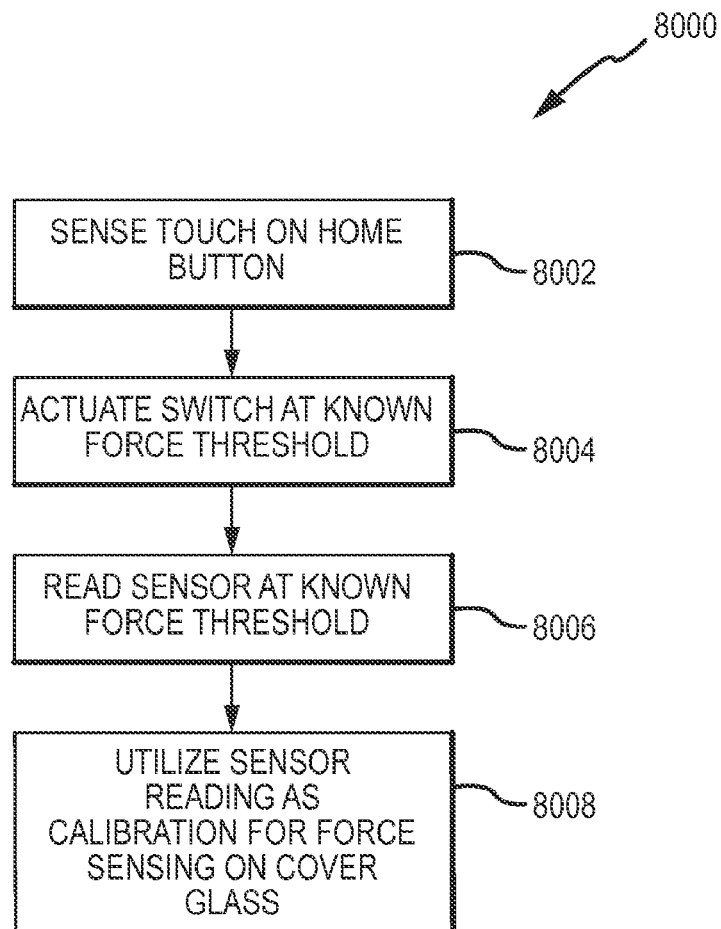


FIG. 11

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FINGERPRINT-ASSISTED FORCE ESTIMATION**CROSS REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS**

This application is a continuation of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 14/417,164, filed Jan. 25, 2015, and entitled "Fingerprint-Assisted Force Estimation," which application is a 35 U.S.C. § 371 application of PCT/US2013/032657, which was filed on Mar. 15, 2013, and entitled "Fingerprint-Assisted Force Estimation," and further claims the benefit under 35 U.S.C. § 119(e) to U.S. provisional application No. 61/676,308, filed Jul. 26, 2012, and entitled, "Fingerprint-Assisted Force Estimation," all of which are incorporated by reference as if fully disclosed herein.

TECHNICAL FIELD

Embodiments are generally related to touch sensitive inputs for electronic devices and, more particularly, to determining a force of a touch.

BACKGROUND

Touch sensitive inputs are common in today's electronic devices. In particular, tablet computers, ebook readers, and smartphones, to name a few, all may rely upon a touch-input display as a primary form of user input. Other devices, such as trackpads, mice, and so forth may also implement touch sensitive input technology. In such devices, the position and/or movement of fingers across the surface of the display is translated as input to the device. Generally, however, the amount of information that may be provided to the device via touch is limited due to the two-dimensional nature of the touched surface.

SUMMARY

In some embodiments, fingerprint contact with the touch surface is used to determine the amount of force applied. That is, how well the fingerprint is wetted to the touch surface (e.g., in contact with the touch surface) is used as one input to determine an applied force.

One embodiment may take the form of a system having a user input device and a first sensor coupled to the user input device. The first sensor is configured to sense touch on a surface of the user input device. The first sensor may be configured to sense a touch on a surface of the user input device. The system may also include a second sensor configured to sense a characteristic of a user's fingerprint on the surface. The system may further include a processor coupled to the first and second sensors and configured to estimate an amount of force applied to the surface by the user's fingerprint based at least in part upon a ratio of ridges to valleys of the user's fingerprint.

Another embodiment may take the form of a method of approximating force. The method includes storing a calibration value in a non-transitory storage medium, determining a contact area of a finger on a fingerprint sensor, determining a ratio of ridges to valleys in the contact area, and obtaining force data from a solid state force sensor. Additionally, the method includes determining a force value based upon the force data, the contact area and the ratio.

While multiple embodiments are disclosed, still other embodiments of the present invention, will become apparent to those skilled in the art from the following Detailed

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Description. As will be realized, the embodiments are capable of modifications in various aspects, all without departing from the spirit and scope of the embodiments. Accordingly, the drawings and detailed description are to be regarded as illustrative in nature and not restrictive.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 illustrates an example electronic device that may implement a fingerprint assisted force determination technique.

FIG. 2 is a block diagram of an example touch I/O device and a host computing system.

FIG. 3 is a block diagram of an example system that includes a touch I/O subsystem.

FIG. 4 is a cross-sectional view of device 1000 taken along line IV-IV in FIG. 1 and illustrating a frustrated total internal reflection sensor.

FIG. 5A illustrates the same cross-sectional view of FIG. 4 with a finger touching the coverglass.

FIG. 5B is a zoomed in view of the finger touching the coverglass.

FIG. 6 illustrates the same-cross-sectional view of FIG. 4 but illustrates an ultrasonic sensor rather than the frustrated total internal reflection sensor.

FIG. 7A illustrates a first layer of the ultrasonic sensor of FIG. 6 as having horizontal sensing elements.

FIG. 7B illustrates a second layer of the ultrasonic sensor of FIG. 6 as having vertical sensing elements.

FIG. 8 is a cross-sectional view taken along line VIII-VIII in FIG. 1.

FIG. 9 is a plot showing the force sensitivity of a capacitive sensor.

FIG. 10 is a plot comparing the force sensitivity of a capacitive sensor with that of a frustrated total internal reflection force sensor.

FIG. 11 is a flowchart illustrating an example method for calibrating solid state force sensor.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Embodiments may take the form of systems, methods and apparatuses that estimate a force applied, by a finger. For example, an, electronic device may incorporate a screen, display or cover that senses a user's touch. The touch screen may capacitively sense the user's touch in certain embodiments. Typically, capacitive-sensing touch screens do not measure the force applied to the screen or coverglass but instead measure the presence or absence of a touch, as well as the contact size of a touch.

In particular, solid state apparatuses are discussed that measure the interaction of a finger with a coverglass. The sensing/estimating of force by a finger allows additional input to be received via a touch input device. In particular, the force of touch or a change in the force of touch may be interpreted as an additional input beyond simple touch, multi-touch, contact and/or proximity inputs.

The force measurement may be made through one or more techniques that may implement software, hardware and/or firmware beyond that which is implemented for the touch sensitivity. In some embodiments, fingerprint contact with the touch surface is used to determine the amount of force applied. That is, how well the fingerprint is wetted to the touch surface is interpreted as an applied force.

One or more technologies may be utilized in the fingerprint-assisted force sensing. For example, capacitive sensing, frustrated total internal reflectance (FTIR), ultrasonic

sensing and/or other sensing technologies may be utilized. Generally, ultrasonic and/or FTIR sensing techniques depend upon a transfer of energy out of a device's coverglass. Generally, more energy transfer out of the coverglass indicates more contact and, therefore, indicates more force being applied. The ultrasonic sensing techniques generally sense reflected energy. Higher amounts of reflected energy indicate high force. As used herein, "coverglass" may refer to a cover intended for touch sensing that is glass, plastic, or another material, clear or opaque.

A fingerprint's wetting (e.g., contact) with the coverglass may vary based upon environmental conditions and biological factors. For example, in humid conditions, ridges and valleys of fingerprints may be more malleable and may provide better contact whereas dry conditions may lead to the opposite results. Additionally, certain users may have sweaty, moist or wet hands that may provide better wetting while others may have dry hands.

Some embodiments may include a calibration aimed at determining a current state of a user's fingerprint. The calibration may be conducted using a button, such as a home button or other input of an electronic device incorporating the touch screen. The button or input may be configured with a mechanical actuator that actuates at a known level of applied force. The button may further include touch and/or fingerprint sensing elements so that, at the moment the mechanical actuator, actuates, a reading of the touch/fingerprint sensor may be made and the amount of sensed touch correlated with the force of the actuation. That is, the amount of sensed touch at the moment of actuation may have a known force which may serve to calibrate the fingerprint assisted force estimation. As one example, a mechanical switch (such as a dome switch) located beneath the button may serve as the mechanical actuator. When the button is pressed with sufficient force, the switch collapses. The touch may be sensed at the moment of collapse as the force necessary to collapse the switch remains constant (e.g., the switch always collapses once the force exceeds the resistance threshold of the dome switch).

Turning to the drawings and referring initially to FIG. 1, an electronic device **1000** is illustrated which may implement fingerprint assisted force measurements. The illustrated electronic device **1000** is a smart phone, such as the iPhone® from Apple, Inc. However, it should be appreciated that various other types of devices may implement the fingerprint assisted force measurement techniques described herein. For example, a notebook computer, table computers, desktop computers, trackpads and so forth, all may implement fingerprint assisted force measurement techniques. The electronic device **1000** includes a display **1002** which may take the form of a touch screen device, such as a capacitive touch screen, or any other suitable display device.

Additionally, the device **1000** includes one or more buttons **1004** and/or other input devices. In some embodiments, the button **1004** may take the form of a home button and may be utilized as a calibration tool for the fingerprint assisted force measurements. As described in greater detail below, the button **1004** may include an element having a known force feature that may be utilized in conjunction with the fingerprint sensing to self-calibrate the device **1000**.

Generally, the display **1002** and/or the button **1004** may include touch-sensitive input/output (I/O) devices. As one example, a fingerprint array sensor may be positioned beneath the button. The fingerprint sensor may capture an image of the finger when the button is touched and/or the mechanical switch located beneath the button collapses. It

should be appreciated that the operation of a fingerprint sensor is generally known in the art.

FIG. 2 illustrates an example block diagram showing an example embodiment including touch I/O device **1006** that can receive touch input for interacting with a computing system **1008**. The communication may be via a wired or wireless communication channel **1010**. Touch I/O device **1006** may be used to provide user input to computing system **1008** in lieu of or in combination with other input devices such as a keyboard, mouse, etc. One or more touch I/O devices **1006** may be used for providing user input to computing system **1008**. Touch I/O device **1006** may be an integral part of computing system **1008** (e.g., touch screen on a laptop) or may be separate from computing system **1008**.

Touch I/O device **1006** may include a touch sensitive panel which is wholly or partially transparent, semitransparent, non-transparent, opaque or any combination thereof. Touch I/O device **1006** may be embodied as a touch screen, touch pad, a touch screen functioning as a touch pad (e.g., a touch screen replacing the touchpad of a laptop), a touch screen or touchpad combined or incorporated with any other input device (e.g., a touch screen or touchpad disposed on a keyboard) or any multi-dimensional object having a touch sensitive surface for receiving touch input.

In one example, touch I/O device **1006** embodied as a touch screen may include a transparent and/or semitransparent touch sensitive panel partially or wholly positioned over at least a portion of a display. According to this embodiment, touch I/O device **1006** functions to display graphical data transmitted from computing system **1008** (and/or another source) and also functions to receive user input. In other embodiments, touch I/O device **1006** may be embodied as an integrated touch screen where touch sensitive components/devices are integral with display components/devices. In still other embodiments a touch screen may be used as a supplemental or additional display screen for displaying supplemental or the same graphical data as a primary display and to receive touch input.

Touch I/O device **1006** may be configured to detect the location of one or more touches or near touches on device **1006** based on capacitive, resistive, optical, acoustic, inductive, mechanical, chemical measurements, or any phenomena that can be measured with respect to the occurrences of the one or more touches or near touches in proximity to device **1006**. Software, hardware, firmware or any combination thereof may be used to process the measurements of the detected touches to identify and track one or more gestures. A gesture may correspond to stationary or non-stationary, single or multiple, touches or near touches on touch I/O device **1006**. A gesture may be performed by moving one or more fingers or other objects in a particular manner on touch I/O device **1006** such as tapping, pressing, rocking, scrubbing, twisting, changing orientation, pressing with varying pressure and the like at essentially the same time, contiguously, or consecutively. A gesture may be characterized by, but is not limited to a pinching, sliding, swiping, rotating, flexing, dragging, or tapping motion between or with any other finger or fingers. A single gesture may be performed with one or more hands, by one or more users, or any combination thereof.

Computing system **1008** may drive a display with graphical data to display a graphical user interface (GUI). The GUI may be configured to receive touch input via touch I/O device **1006**. Embodied as a touch screen, touch I/O device **1006** may display the GUI. Alternatively, the GUI may be displayed on a display separate from touch I/O device **1006**.

The GUI may include graphical elements displayed at particular locations within the interface. Graphical elements may, include but are not, limited to, a variety of displayed virtual input devices including virtual scroll wheels, a virtual keyboard, virtual knobs, virtual buttons, any virtual UI, and the like. A user may perform gestures at one or more particular locations on touch I/O device **1006** which may be associated with the graphical elements of the GUI. In other embodiments, the user may perform gestures at one or more locations that are independent of the locations of graphical elements of the GUI. Gestures performed on touch I/O device **1006** may directly or indirectly manipulate, control, modify, move, actuate, initiate or generally affect graphical elements such as cursors, icons, media files, lists, text, all or portions of images, or the like within the GUI. For instance, in the case of a touch screen, a user may directly interact with a graphical element by performing a gesture over the graphical element on the touch screen. Alternatively, a touch pad generally provides indirect interaction. Gestures may also affect non-displayed GUI elements (e.g., causing user interfaces to appear) or may affect other actions within computing system **1008** (e.g., affect a state or mode of a GUI, application, or operating system). Gestures may or may not be performed on touch I/O device **1006** in conjunction with a displayed cursor. For instance, in the case in which gestures are performed on a touchpad, a cursor (or pointer) may be displayed on a display screen or touch screen and the cursor may be controlled via touch input on the touchpad to interact with graphical objects on the display screen. In other embodiments in which gestures are performed directly on a touch screen, a user may interact directly with objects on the touch screen, with or without a cursor or pointer being displayed on the touch screen.

Feedback may be provided to the user via communication channel **1010** in response to or based on the touch or near touches on touch I/O device **1006**. Feedback may be transmitted optically, mechanically, electrically, olfactory, acoustically, or the like or any combination thereof and in a variable or non-variable manner.

Attention is now directed towards embodiments of a system architecture that may be embodied within any portable or non-portable device including but not limited to a communication device (e.g. mobile phone, smart phone), a multi-media device (e.g., MP3 player, TV, radio), a portable or handheld computer (e.g., tablet, netbook, laptop), a desktop computer, an All-In-One desktop, a peripheral device, or any other system or device adaptable to the inclusion of system architecture **2000**, including combinations of two or more of these types of devices. FIG. **3** is a block diagram of one embodiment of system **2000** that generally includes one or more computer-readable mediums **2001**, processing system **2004**, Input/Output (I/O) subsystem **2006**, radio frequency (RF) circuitry **2008** and audio circuitry **2010**. These components may be coupled by one or more communication buses or signal lines **2003**.

It should be apparent that the architecture shown in FIG. **3** is only one example architecture of system **2000**, and that, system **2000** could have more or fewer components than shown, or a different configuration of components. The various components shown in FIG. **3** can be implemented in hardware, software, firmware or any combination thereof, including one or more signal processing and/or application specific integrated circuits.

RF circuitry **2008** is used to send and receive information over a wireless link or network to one or more other devices and includes well-known circuitry for performing this function. RF circuitry **2008** and audio circuitry **2010** are coupled

to processing system **2004** via peripherals interface **2016**. Interface **2016** includes various known components for establishing and maintaining communication between peripherals and processing system **2004**. Audio circuitry **2010** is coupled to audio speaker **2050** and microphone **2052** and includes known circuitry for processing voice signals received from interface **2016** to enable a user to communicate in real-time with other users. In some embodiments, audio circuitry **2010** includes a headphone jack (not shown).

Peripherals interface **2016** couples the input and output peripherals of the system to processor **2018** and computer-readable medium **2001**. One or more processors **2018** communicate with one or more computer-readable mediums **2001** via controller **2020**. Computer-readable medium **2001** can be any device or medium that can store code and/or data for use by one or more processors **2018**. Medium **2001** can include a memory hierarchy, including but not limited to cache, main memory and secondary memory. The memory hierarchy can be implemented using any combination of RAM (e.g., SRAM, DRAM, DDRAM), ROM, FLASH, magnetic and/or optical storage devices, such as disk drives, magnetic tape, CDs (compact disks) and DVDs (digital video discs). Medium **2001** may also include a transmission medium for carrying information-bearing signals indicative of computer instructions or data (with or without a carrier wave upon which the signals are modulated). For example, the transmission medium may include a communications network, including but not limited to the Internet (also referred to as the World Wide Web), intranet(s), Local Area Networks (LANs), Wide Local Area Networks (WLANs), Storage Area Networks (SANs), Metropolitan Area Networks (MAN) and the like.

One or more processors **2018** run various software components stored in medium **2001** to perform various functions for system **2000**. In some embodiments, the software components include operating system **2022**, communication module (or set of instructions) **2024**, touch processing module (or set of instructions) **2026**, graphics module (or set of instructions) **2028**, one or more applications (or set of instructions) **2030**, and fingerprint force module (or set of instructions) **2038**. Each of these modules and above noted applications correspond to a set of instructions for performing one or more functions described above and the methods described in this application (e.g., the computer-implemented methods and other information processing methods described herein). These modules (i.e., sets of instructions) need not be implemented as separate software programs, procedures or modules, and thus various subsets of these modules may be combined or otherwise re-arranged in various embodiments. In some embodiments, medium **2001** may store a subset of the modules and data structures identified above. Furthermore, medium **2001** may store additional modules and data structures not described above.

Operating system **2022** includes various procedures, sets of instructions, software components and/or drivers for controlling and managing general system tasks (e.g., memory management, storage device control, power management, etc.) and facilitates communication between various hardware and software components.

Communication module **2024** facilitates communication with other devices over one or more external ports **2036** or via RF circuitry **2008** and includes various software components for handling data received from RF circuitry **2008** and/or external port **2036**.

Graphics module **2028** includes various known software components for rendering, animating and displaying graphical objects on a display surface. In embodiments in which

touch I/O device **2012** is a touch sensitive display (e.g., touch screen), graphics module **2028** includes components for rendering, displaying, and animating objects on the touch sensitive display.

One or more applications **2030** can include any applications installed on system **2000**, including without limitation, a browser, address book, contact list, email, instant messaging, word processing, keyboard emulation, widgets, JAVA-enabled applications, encryption, digital rights management, voice recognition, voice, replication, location determination capability (such as that provided by the global positioning system (GPS)), a music player, etc.

Touch processing module **2026** includes various software components for performing various tasks associated with touch I/O device **2012** including but not limited to receiving and processing touch input received from I/O device **2012** via touch I/O device controller **2032**.

System **2000** may further include fingerprint force module **2038** for, performing the method/functions as described herein in connection with FIGS. **4-11**. Fingerprint force module **2038** may at least function to determine if a force threshold has been exceeded. Module **2038** may also interact with applications, software, hardware and/or other devices within the system **2000**. Module **2038** may be embodied as hardware, software, firmware, or any combination thereof. Although module **2038** is shown to reside within medium **2001**, all or portions of module **2038** may be embodied within other components within system **2000** or may be wholly embodied as a separate component within system **2000**.

I/O subsystem **2006** is coupled to touch I/O device **2012** and one or more other I/O devices **2014** for controlling or performing various functions. Touch I/O device **2012** communicates with processing system **2004** via touch I/O device controller **2032**, which includes various components for processing user touch input (e.g., scanning hardware). A fingerprint sensor **2042** and a fingerprint controller **2044** may also be included to receive and communicate the fingerprint sensing with the processing system. One or more other input controllers **2034** receives/sends electrical signals from/to other I/O devices **2014**. Other I/O devices **2014** may include physical buttons, dials, slider switches, sticks, keyboards, touch pads, additional display screens, or any combination thereof.

If embodied as a touch screen, touch I/O device **2012** displays visual output to the user in a GUI. The visual output may include text, graphics, video, and any combination thereof. Some or all of the visual output may correspond to user-interface objects. Touch I/O device **2012** forms a touch-sensitive surface that accepts touch input from the user. Touch I/O device **2012** and touch screen controller **2032** (along with any associated modules and/or sets of instructions in medium **2001**) detects and tracks touches or near touches (and any movement or release of the touch) on touch I/O device **2012** and converts the detected touch input into interaction with graphical objects, such as one or more user-interface objects. In the case in which device **2012** is embodied as a touch screen, the user can directly interact with graphical objects that are displayed on the touch screen. Alternatively, in the case in which device **2012** is embodied as a touch device other than a touch screen (e.g., a touch pad), the user may indirectly interact with graphical objects that are displayed on a separate display screen embodied as I/O device **2014**.

Touch I/O device **2012** may be analogous to the multi-touch sensitive surface described in the following U.S. Pat. No. 6,323,846 (Westerman et al.), U.S. Pat. No. 6,570,557

(Westerman et al), and/or U.S. Pat. No. 6,677,932 (Westerman), and/or U.S. Patent Publication 2002/0015024A1, each of which is hereby incorporated by reference.

Embodiments in which touch I/O device **2012** is a touch screen, the touch screen may use LCD (liquid crystal display) technology, LPD (light emitting polymer display) technology, OLED (organic LED), or OEL (organic electro luminescence), although other display technologies may be used in other embodiments.

Feedback may be provided by touch I/O device **2012** based on the user's touch input as well as a state or states of what is being displayed and/or of the computing system. Feedback may be transmitted optically (e.g., light signal or displayed image), mechanically (e.g., haptic feedback, touch feedback, force feedback, or the like), electrically (e.g., electrical stimulation), olfactory, acoustically (e.g., beep or the like), or the like or any combination thereof and, in a variable or non-variable manner.

The I/O subsystem **2006** may include and/or be coupled to one or more sensors configured to be utilized in the force determination. In particular, the I/O subsystem **2006** may include an LED **3002** and a sensor **3004**, and/or an ultrasonic sensor **4000**. Each of the LED **3002**, sensor **3004** and ultrasonic sensor **4000** may be coupled to the touch I/O device controller **2032**, or another I/O controller (not shown). The LED **3002**, sensor **3004** and ultrasonic sensor **4000** will each be discussed in greater detail below.

System **2000** also includes power system **2044** for powering the various hardware components and may include a power management system, one or more power sources, a recharging system, a power failure detection circuit, a power converter or inverter, a power status indicator and any other components typically associated with the generation, management and distribution of power in portable devices.

In some embodiments, peripherals interface **2016**, one or more processors **2018**, and memory controller **2020** may be implemented on a single chip, such as processing system **2004**. In some other embodiments, they may be implemented on separate chips.

Turning to FIG. **4**, a cross-sectional view taken along line in FIG. **1** illustrates the FTIR solid state sensor. In the FTIR technique, electromagnetic energy **3001**, such as light, is directed into the coverglass **3000**. The electromagnetic energy **3001** may be provided by any suitable device. For example, a light emitting diode **3002** may be used to provide the electromagnetic energy. A conduit such as a light guide may help inject the light into coverglass **3000**. A sensor **3004** is provided to sense the level of electromagnetic energy in the coverglass **3000**. A conduit such as a light guide **3006** may help extract the electromagnetic energy from the coverglass **3000**. A touch sensor **3008**, such as a capacitive touch sensor described above, may be located below the coverglass to sense touch.

The FTIR technique senses attenuation of the electromagnetic energy **3001** in the coverglass. That is, the coverglass **3000** may generally have an index of refraction different from that of air which may contact the coverglass. Specifically, the air or other substance in contact with the coverglass has a lower index of refraction than that of the coverglass **3000**. For example, the coverglass may have an index of refraction at, near or above 1.4, whereas air may have an index of refraction of approximately 1.0. The electromagnetic energy **3001** is inserted into the coverglass so that it has an angle of incidence greater than the "critical angle." The critical angle is generally an angle relative to a normal to a boundary interface below which refraction occurs and above which total reflection occurs.

Due to the difference in the index of refraction and the angle of incidence, the electromagnetic energy inserted, into the coverglass experiences total internal reflection. That is, none of the electromagnetic energy refracts through the boundary of the coverglass. When a finger touches the coverglass, however, the electromagnetic energy refracts, thereby attenuating the electromagnetic energy reflected within the coverglass. The attenuation may be determined and correlated with an amount of force being applied.

Generally, a lighter touch will result in a lower attenuation. This is due in part to the total surface area of the finger that makes contact with the coverglass surface and allows the electromagnetic energy to refract. With a light touch, only the top of a fingerprint's ridges make contact with the coverglass surface. Contrastingly, when more force is applied, a greater surface area of the ridges will contact the coverglass surface and, thereby, result in greater attenuation through refraction.

FIG. 5A illustrates a finger touching **3010** the surface **3012** of the coverglass **3000**. FIG. 5B is a zoomed-in view of the finger touching the surface. As shown, the ridges of the fingerprint make contact with the surface of the coverglass and allow electromagnetic energy to escape through the boundary of the coverglass. The valleys of the fingerprint, however, do not make contact and light does not escape via the valleys. An attenuated signal **3001'** remains within the coverglass **3000**. The attenuated signal **3001'** is sensed and a determination of force may be made based on the attenuated signal.

Turning to FIG. 6, a cross-section view taken along line IV-IV of FIG. 1 is illustrated as having an ultrasonic sensor **4000** coupled thereto to sense force, in accordance with an alternative embodiment. The ultrasonic sensor **4000** may be located under the capacitive touch sensor **3008**. The ultrasonic sensor **4000** transmits a signal up through the coverglass **3000** and then senses reflected signals. When a finger is touching the coverglass, the finger will reflect signal. For the ultrasonic sensor embodiment, a display without an air gap may be implemented. For example, an organic light emitting diode (OLED) display or liquid crystal display (LCD) may be implemented.

The ultrasonic sensor **4000** may take any suitable form and in some embodiments may take the form of a piezoelectric sensor that is actuated by applying a voltage. The ultrasonic sensor **4000** may include multiple layers. FIGS. 7A and 7B illustrate two layers of the sensor. Specifically, FIG. 7A illustrates a first layer **4002** having horizontally arranged sensors **4004**. FIG. 7B illustrates a second layer **4006** having vertically arranged sensors **4008**, or sensors arranged cross-wise from those of the first layer **4002**. The first and second layers **4002**, **4006** are stacked to form the sensor. Generally, in one embodiment for example, a pattern of pulses may be propagated through columns and reflected on the rows.

That is, the columns may be ultrasonic drivers while the rows are ultrasonic sensors, or vice-versa. In some embodiments, there may be more ultrasonic sensors than drivers.

In some embodiments, the ultrasonic sensor **4000** may be configured with each sensor spaced five millimeters apart in both the vertical and horizontal direction so that the sensor has five millimeter by five millimeter pixels. In some embodiments, the ultrasonic sensor may not be able to recognize a fingerprint, but could estimate where energy is being absorbed so that force may be approximated. That is, the spacing between sensors may provide a gross measurement of contact between the finger and the coverglass; this measurement may lack resolution to detect individual ridges and

valleys of a fingerprint but may detect the size of the contact area with the coverglass (within the resolution of the sensors). The size of that contact patch may serve as a proxy for the force exerted by the user, as larger contact patches may equate to a larger exerted force, all other things being equal. A larger the contact area generally indicates a higher force. The system can have several different size-to-force curves stored in memory, possibly as data points in a look-up table. The curves may represent fingers having different wetting characteristics. The contact patch created when the dome switch beneath the home button collapses can be measured through the fingerprint sensor by evaluation of a ratio of the ridges to the valleys, as the size and ratio determine the amount of flesh that makes contact within the contact patch. The higher this ratio is the wetter the user's skin is. That ratio can be used to figure out which of the size-to-force curves to use for later touches on the coverglass. Thus, compensation may be made for the wetting of the person's skin and more accurately measure force, since a single reading that gives wetting information at a known force may be used as a calibration for subsequent force readings.

For each of the FTIR and ultrasonic techniques, fingerprints may vary based on temperature, moisture content, environmental conditions and so on, and this will impact how well the fingerprint is wetted to the coverglass. That is, environmental and/or biological factors may affect how well the fingerprint couples to the surface of the coverglass. As such, a calibration may be performed for each session of use of the fingerprint assisted force determination that includes an estimation of the condition of the finger.

FIG. 8 is a cross-sectional view taken along line VIII-VIII in FIG. 1. The cross-section shows the structure of the button **1004**. Specifically, the button **1004** includes a touch sensing element **5002** and a force threshold element **5004**. The touch sensing element **5002** may take any suitable form and in some embodiments may include a capacitive touch sensor array. In other embodiments, the touch sensing element may take the form of an FTIR touch sensor, an ultrasonic sensor, or any combination of such sensors.

The force threshold element **5004** may be configured to actuate upon receiving a threshold amount of force. For example, the force threshold element may take the form of a dome or buckling switch that buckles upon application of a threshold force. The threshold force for actuation of the force threshold element **5004** may be set at any reasonable level. In some embodiments, the threshold force may be set to approximately 200 grams. That is the buckling switch may buckle when approximately 200 grams of force are applied. In other embodiments, the force threshold may be greater than or less than 200 grams force.

The touch sensing element **5002** may operate concurrently and in conjunction with the force threshold element **5004** as a calibrating tool. Specifically, at the moment that the force threshold element **5004** actuates, the touch sensing element **5002** may obtain a reading indicating the amount of contact of the finger at the threshold force level. This information may be used to know how well the finger wets with a surface and, in particular, the amount of force being applied when similar readings are achieved.

As the button **1004** may have a curved surface with which a user's finger interfaces, the touch measurements may be slightly skewed. As such, touch sensing data may be appropriately modified to translate the readings for use on a flat surface. In some embodiments, only the center portion of the button is used to read in the touch data. In other embodiments, the edge portion of the button is used to read in the

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touch data. In still other embodiments, a filter may be applied to limit the effects of the curved surface on the touch readings.

The data read by the touch sensor **5002** may be stored and utilized to make determinations of force applied to the touch screen. In particular, the touch sensor data may be used as an indicator of fingerprint wetting. That is, how well a person's fingerprint wets to the touch screen. As individual biological and environmental factors may influence how well a particular user's finger wets to the touch screen, the calibration provided by the touch sensor data may help to achieve more accurate force sensing results. For example, when using an FTIR sensor, in particularly humid conditions the user's finger may wet well with the surface and thus the amount of attenuation will be greater than under dry conditions. The calibration step will help to recognize that a higher amount of attenuation may be expected and avoid false positives for exceeding an actuation force level. Alternatively, reflected signals detected by the ultrasonic sensor may increase under humid conditions.

Generally, where a capacitive sensor is used as a calibration sensor, there may be two parameters of interest. Specifically, the two parameters of interest may include: (1) the average capacitance between a capacitive array and a finger, and (2) the variation of capacitance between fingerprint ridge and finger print valley. The first parameter may be used as a baseline in determining if a particular fingerprint wets better or more poorly than average. The second parameter is related to the first parameter but allows a determination as to whether the ridges alone or the ridges and valleys are in contact with, the target surface. With these two parameters it may be determined that if the signal capacitance is high then the person has good flexible prominent fingerprint that wets well to the surface (e.g., there will be a high signal voltage at moment of 200 grams of force). Hence, in the FTIR example, there will be a high attenuation of signal when user touches coverglass and the signal should be adjusted or scaled accordingly.

FIG. 9 is a plot **6000** illustrating force sensitivity for a capacitive sensor under wet and dry conditions. For example, the plot may represent readings obtained from a user pressing on a home button. Thus, the plot **6000** may be used to help calibrate force estimations of subsequent touches on a cover glass. The solid line **6002** represents the wet conditions and the dotted line **6004** represents dry conditions. Additionally, the vertical axis **6006** represents a change in signal strength and the horizontal axis **6008** represents the amount of force applied. As shown, the capacitive sensor has a significant change in signal prior to a finger making contact with the surface. The signal flattens as force is applied in both wet and dry conditions.

Additionally, a mechanical actuator may actuate upon receiving a known force level. For example, the mechanical actuator may actuate at approximately 200 grams. Using the curves, the signal characteristics when the mechanical actuator actuates may be used to know if a user's touch registers on the "wet" curve **6002** or the "dry" curve **6004**, or somewhere in between. With that information, the appropriate curve in FIG. 10 may be selected to generate a more accurate proxy for force. It should be appreciated that the wet and dry curves are related to a finger's wetting characteristics. The environment may influence this characteristic, but it's only one factor of several or many.

FIG. 10 is a plot **7000** illustrating force sensitivity for the capacitive sensor and other sensors for the purpose of comparison. The capacitive sensor plot **6002** is the same as illustrated in FIG. 9. Both wet (**7002**) and dry (**7004**) plots

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of the FTIR sensor are shown. In contrast to the capacitive sensor, the FTIR sensor shows sharp increases in signal changes after contact with the surface. Under dry conditions, the plot line **7004** has a shallower slope than under wet conditions. However, even under dry conditions, the FTIR sensor demonstrates significant signal changes induced by force changes. As such, the FTIR and ultrasonic sensors generally have better sensitivity to force than a capacitive sensor. Ultrasonic sensors will generally demonstrate plot characteristics similar to those of the FTIR sensor. It should be noted, however, that FIG. 10 shows merely generalized representations of force-to-signal curves. The curves may vary depending on whether FTIR or ultrasonics are, used, the configuration of the emitters and detectors, and so forth.

Generally, an object of using the plot **6000** of FIG. 9 with the curves **7002**, **7004** is to use the data captured by the fingerprint sensor when the button collapses to help improve a force estimation of touches on a cover glass. If the data shows that the person has a "wet" fingerprint, and so is on curve **6002** of FIG. 9 when the button collapses, then curve **7002** may be used when the user touches the coverglass to approximate force. If the user was on curve **6004** when the button collapses, then curve **7004** is used for coverglass touches. As such, the readings from one sensor that has a known force activation point, and, is associated with a first input device (e.g., fingerprint scanner), is used to calibrate a completely different sensor associated with a completely different input device (e.g., touch screen).

FIG. 11 is a flowchart illustrating an example method **8000** for implementing the fingerprint assisted force determination. The method begins by sensing a touch on the home button (Block **8002**). Upon reaching a threshold level of force, the force threshold element actuates (Block **8004**) and a touch sensor is read (Block **8006**). The reading is then used as a calibration for force sensing on the coverglass (Block **8008**). In some embodiments, a look up table may be provided that correlates the sensor reading with those that may be read from the coverglass.

The use of a lookup table may allow for estimation of force based on readings from the sensors associated with the coverglass. This information may then be used to determine when a user changes the amount of force that is being applied, for example, when making a selection. Furthermore, in some embodiments, as the amount of force increases, there may be one or more actuation thresholds that may be applied. Each force threshold may have a different action associate with it. For example, upon reaching a first force threshold (e.g. 200 grams) an area, icon or word may be highlighted or selected. Upon reaching a second force threshold (e.g. 400 grams) an action may be taken, such as autocorrect of a misspelled word, routing to a linked website, or executing a command related to an icon. As such, a diversity of functionality may be provided through multiple levels of force thresholds.

The foregoing describes some example techniques using fingerprints in force estimation. Although the foregoing discussion has presented specific embodiments, persons skilled in the art will recognize that changes may be made in form and detail without departing from the spirit and scope of the embodiments. For example, it should be appreciated that information obtained through the calibration steps may be used to scale measured force data to obtain a force value. For example, the calibration may simply be a multiplier obtained from an initial wetting determination step. Furthermore, in some embodiments, a total area of a fingerprint may be used alone or in conjunction with one or more other measured or estimated parameters. For example,

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a capacitive touch sensor may be used to determine the total area of a fingerprint and/or a variance in the size of the area and force may be estimated based on the area or change in area. Accordingly, the specific embodiments described herein should be understood as examples and not limiting the scope thereof.

The invention claimed is:

1. A system comprising:
a user input device;
a first sensor coupled to the user input device, wherein the first sensor is configured to sense a contact area of a touch on a surface of the user input device;
a second sensor configured to sense ridges and valleys of a fingerprint associated with the touch; and
a processor coupled to the first and second sensors and configured to estimate an amount of force applied to the surface by the touch based at least in part upon an evaluation of the ridges and the valleys of the fingerprint within the contact area.
2. The system of claim 1, wherein the second sensor comprises one of a capacitive touch sensor, a frustrated total internal reflection sensor, or an ultrasonic sensor.
3. The system of claim 1, wherein the first sensor comprises a capacitive touch sensor.
4. The system of claim 1, wherein the user input device comprises a cover disposed over a display device.
5. The system of claim 4, wherein the display device comprises one of an organic light emitting diode device or a liquid crystal display device.
6. The system of claim 1, wherein the user input device comprises one of a trackpad, a mouse, or a touch screen.
7. The system of claim 1, further comprising a force calibration system.
8. The system of claim 7, wherein the force calibration system comprises: a mechanical actuator; and a touch sensor.
9. The system of claim 8, wherein the mechanical actuator comprises a button having a known force threshold.
10. The system of claim 9, wherein the known force threshold is 200 grams.
11. The system of claim 8, wherein the touch sensor comprises one of a capacitive touch sensor, a frustrated total internal reflectance sensor or an ultrasonic sensor.

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12. The system of claim 7, wherein the force calibration system is integrated into a home button of the device.

13. The system of claim 7 further comprising a look up table, the look up table correlating a characteristic of the ridges and the valleys of the fingerprint sensed by the second sensor with the amount of force applied to the surface; wherein

the processor is further configured to estimate the amount of force by referencing the look up table.

14. A method of approximating force comprising:

storing a calibration value in a non-transitory storage medium;

detecting, with a capacitive sensor, a contact area of a finger on a fingerprint sensor;

detecting ridges of a fingerprint and valleys of the fingerprint of the finger with a solid state sensor;

determining a ratio of the ridges to the valleys in the contact area; and

determining a force value based upon the calibration value, the contact area and the ratio.

15. The method of claim 14 further comprising:

operating a mechanical actuator, the mechanical actuator having a known force threshold; and

capturing the calibration value by reading data from a touch sensor associated with the mechanical actuator.

16. The method of claim 15, wherein the known force threshold is 200 grams.

17. The method of claim 14, wherein the detecting ridges of the fingerprint and valleys of the fingerprint comprises operating at least one of:

a frustrated total internal reflectance sensor; or
an ultrasonic sensor.

18. The method of claim 14, wherein the determining the force value further comprises referencing a look-up table with the calibration value.

19. The method of claim 14, wherein the determining the force value comprises scaling force data received from the solid state sensor based on the calibration value.

20. The method of claim 14 further comprising replacing the stored calibration value upon initiation of each unique session.

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